

THE
S Y S T E M
OF
PLOTINUS

**A SYNTHESIS OF THE PLOTINIAN
PHILOSOPHIC RELIGIOUS MYSTICISM**

BY
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THE
SYSTEM
OF
PLOTINUS

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PROEMIAL

THE aim of this Manual is to present a systematic exposition of the System of Plotinus and to unfold the nature of those fundamental principles upon which the whole of the Plotinian Philosophy is based.

Those who have neither the time nor the opportunity to study the *Enneads* themselves may thus have a glimpse of the Plotinian Teachings in a synthetical form, whilst those who desire to go more thoroughly into the various treatises may approach the *Enneads* in some measure equipped, and, having gained a vision of the Universal, may the more easily develop the Particular.

Especially is this little book compiled for the Seeker who aspires to become a Disciple of the Master Plotinus, to be inspired by his ardent spirit, to share his clear insight, and follow in his footsteps to the sublime experience of the finding of his own Soul.

Synthesis has been aimed at rather than Analysis, with the endeavour to reveal the foundation of the Plotinian Philosophy upon the triple rock of the Divine Hypostases and the pathway to the Mysticism of Plotinus in the threefold quest for the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

We would like to take this opportunity of tendering our sincere acknowledgment to Dr. W. R. Inge, Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie, and Stephen MacKenna for the very valuable assistance received from their works on Plotinus, to which the attention of all our readers is recommended.

"It is the secret of the power of Plotinus . . . that in him the mystic's impulse to the finding of his own Soul and the scientific impulse to criticize and understand experience are so completely united. There have been men in whom the power of metaphysical insight was as keen or keener than in Plotinus; there have been men who have lived the life of the mystic as intensely, if not more intensely. But there has perhaps never been another mystic who was so great a metaphysician, nor another metaphysician of equal power who lived so saintly a life with the same intensity." . . . "It is probably no exaggeration to say that as an acute psychological observer Plotinus has no equal in antiquity except his Master, Plato, and that very few modern psychologists have shown so true an eye for the facts of the *vie intime* of the Soul as either."—("The Times, Lit. Sup.," 27. 2. 1919.)

THE VENERABLE MASTER PLOTINUS AND HIS SYSTEM OF PHILOSOPHICAL- RELIGIOUS MYSTICISM

§ 1. INTRODUCTORY.

THE Venerable Master Plotinus was born in the year 205 A.D., at Lycopolis, in Egypt, and died near Rome in 270 A.D. The exact dates of his birth and death are not recorded, but his suggested commemoration is the 10th October.

He early began his search for Truth, but it was not until 28 years of age that he found what he sought when he met the great, but little known, Ammonius Saccas, "the God-taught Philosopher." He became the disciple of Ammonius, subsequently performing the same work for his master as Plato had done for Socrates. Neither Socrates nor Ammonius Saccas committed their teachings to writing and consequently their greatness is not always recognized. But that they were teachers of the highest rank is evident from the fact that such great sages as Plato and Plotinus should have regarded them as their masters.

The Immortal Plato is the Master Philosopher and Idealist, while the "Divine" Plotinus is the Master of Philosophic Religious Mysticism. This is the distinction between them. Many ideals of Plato are given practical expression and application in the System of Plotinus.

The predominant personal characteristics of Plotinus were his honesty, sincerity, indifference to public opinion, gentleness, humility and fiery zeal for the Cause of Truth.

"He was pre-eminently distinguished for the strength and profundity of his intellect and the purity and elevation of his life. He was a being wise without the usual mixture of human darkness, and great without the general combination of human weakness and imperfection."—(T. Taylor.)

"The main object of Plotinus was to bring back Souls to their Heavenly Father. The Philosopher himself lived the life of a Saint, austerely simple in his habits, though without any harsh asceticism, he won all hearts by his gentle and affectionate nature and his sympathy with all that is good and beautiful in the world. His countenance, naturally handsome, seemed—so Porphyry tells us—to radiate light and love when he discoursed with his friends.

He was a shy man and signs of nervousness were frequently observed while he lectured. This diffidence led him to mask his own originality. He never presumed upon the favour of Heaven, or supposed that private revelations had been made to him. He had, as he believed, experienced the beatific vision of the All-transcending Godhead; but such privileges were, according to his conviction, very rare exceptions; they were to be waited for, not sought: he never tried to throw himself into an ecstatic state, and never claims that any mysteries were revealed to him while in a state of trance. There is not the slightest trace of hysterical emotion in Plotinus."—(W. R. Inge.)

He was a true Mystic; that is, one who was conscious of the immanence of the divine in the human, and of the spiritual in the material. He not only knew the *truth* of what he taught but also the *reality* of it; and because of this, the world of Sense held no attractions for him save in so far as it could express the world of Spirit. He has sometimes been criticized for his apparent contempt for the physical body but, in the light of his teaching, one can see that to him his body was simply what he considered it ought to be, *i.e.*, the instrument of expression of the Soul.

He led a simple but practical life of Service, and had many zealous and loving disciples.

He began writing in the year 252 A.D., but apparently without any intention of developing a comprehensive System. Altogether he produced 54 treatises which later were arranged by his disciple Porphyry into six sets of nine each, hence the six Enneads. Humanity owes much to the genius and untiring labours of the learned Porphyry, for without his work it is doubtful whether the Teaching of Plotinus would have been transmitted to posterity. It was all so self-evident and natural to Plotinus that he probably did not fully realize its immense value.

"The sustained elevation of thought; the intense honesty of the man, who never shirks a difficulty or writes an insincere word; the deep seriousness which makes him disdain all ornament and fine writing, but frequently moves him to real eloquence by the grandeur of his intellectual visions; the beauty of holiness which pervades even the abstruse parts of the dialectic, produces a profound impression on those who have given themselves time to surmount the initial difficulties of reading the Enneads."—(W. R. Inge.)

"The facility and vehemence of his composition was such that when he had once conceived a subject, he wrote as from an internal pattern, without paying much attention to the orthography, or reviewing what he had written: for the celestial vigour of his Intellect rendered him incapable of trifling concerns, and in this respect inferior to common understandings, as the eagle, which in its bold flight pierces the clouds, but skims the earth with less rapidity than the swallow."—(T. Taylor.)

However, the consciousness of the inaccuracy of his literal composition arising from the rapidity, exuberance and daring sublimity of his thoughts, moved him to commit his work to Porphyry for revision.

Nevertheless his style remains difficult and has baffled many an ardent student.

It is concise and not easy to follow. It is dense with thought and more lavish with ideas than with words. Moreover, the *Enneads* do not constitute a systematic exposition of his system, but each separate treatise takes the form of a special development of a particular phase. The reason for this is that the entire system is assumed in each individual treatise: the whole is in every part. Like Plato, Plotinus never loses sight of the Universal when developing the Particular. Hence, failing a previous acquaintance with his fundamental principles, almost all his treatises must at first sight appear incomprehensible and often be radically misunderstood.

It is sometimes affirmed that the later writings of Plotinus are inferior to the earlier ones, but this could hardly be the case with such a man as he.

"The gradation of excellence consists in the power of composition and not in the matter of which they are composed."—(T. Taylor.)

"The whole of the *Enneads* were written by a man at the summit of his powers: there is no sign anywhere either of immature crudeness or of senile decay."—(W. R. Inge.)

In any case there is so much in all of his writings that is so self-evidently true when considered in its proper relationship that one may safely ignore any apparent and minor inconsistencies and attribute them to errors in transmission. Furthermore, it must be remembered that he frequently employs paradoxical and figurative language, hence he is not

always to be taken literally, nor, indeed, can mere words ever adequately express the absolute Truth.

True, he does sometimes write enigmatically and as though he himself were doubtful, but behind it all is a suggestive finger pointing to some abstract truth which escapes precise definition.

He "demands constant effort from his readers," and this is what few are ready to give. But

"the man who studies Plotinus as a moral guide will not often be at a loss except in problems which it is not the province of religion and philosophy to solve."—(W. R. Inge.)

"Plotinus must be studied as a spiritual director, a prophet, and not only a thinker. His is one of the most ambitious of all philosophical systems, for he not only attempts to unite and reconcile what was best in all Greek Philosophy, but he claims to have found the way of deliverance and salvation for the Soul of Man, in whatever circumstances he may be placed. And, as he is never tired of telling us, we can only understand him by following him and making his experience our own.

"The quest is for him who will undergo the discipline and follow the gleam."—(Ibid.)

The Plotinian System is philosophical because the more it is understood by the mind the more real it becomes, and the more it intrinsically appeals to the higher intuitional and reasoning faculties of man.

It is religious because it explains man's proper relationships with God and correlates the human nature to the Divine, demonstrating the dependence of the former upon the latter.

It is mystical, in the original sense of that term, because it blends philosophy with religion and unfolds the mystical path of the Soul's liberation from the bonds of Matter.

Plotinus, thus leads the aspiring Soul upward and inward by pathways that are three in one,—by the dialectics of philosophy to the True: by the virtues of religion to the Good, and by mystical love to the Beautiful.

In estimating the value and the veracity of any system of teaching, there are several standards of judgment that may be applied. For instance, its value is self-evident and unmistakable if it can furnish satisfactory solutions to such problems as :—

(1) The Supernal Nature of the Supreme Deity ;

- (2) The Order of the Spiritual and Material Universes;
- (3) The Origin and Destiny of the Soul;
- (4) The Origin and Nature of Evil;
- (5) The Means of Attaining Deliverance and Perfection.

These, and many other mysteries are revealed in the Plotinian System.

The veracity of a system of thought is confirmed by the degree in which it answers such criteria as—Unity, Harmony, Universality and Adequacy.

Again the System of Plotinus admirably meets these tests.

Because of its Unity and Harmony all its various aspects and partitive expressions are intimately related, and by synthesis they can be grouped under specific fundamental and unitive principles all of which are harmoniously co-ordinated with each other and with the Primal Unity of all unities.

The Adequacy of the Plotinian System is obvious because it embraces in a most comprehensive manner all that is implied by the three basic Ideals of Truth, Goodness and Beauty, providing objects of aspiration for the intellectual, volitional and affectional faculties of man.

The tenets of Plotinus are Universal. They are confirmable in every sphere of consciousness and activity. His fundamental principles appear under varying terminology in almost every great system of thought, evincing thereby the universality of his conceptions: for he not only comprehended all phases of existence here below, but, transcending these realms of transiency, entered into a living consciousness of that which is above, Yonder.

"The utterance of Plato, the most pure and bright in all philosophy, scattering the clouds of error, has shone forth most of all in Plotinus, who has been deemed so like his master that one might think them contemporaries, if the length of time between them did not compel us to say that in Plotinus Plato lived again."
—(St. Augustine, "Contra Academicos," 3, 18.)

Plato and Plotinus are still very much alive, and the army of their followers is ever increasing. The expositions of their teachings are growing in volume, but as different exponents adopt different terminology the key given on p. 58 may be of service to those of our readers who aspire to be disciples of "the most Divine Plotinus," as he has been called.

"THE SYSTEM OF PLOTINUS"

§ 2. OUTLINE.

IN the "Enneads" no comprehensive outline can be found of the Plotinian System, hence a beginner may find difficulty at first in apprehending it as a whole. Perhaps the easiest mode of approaching it is to do so by way of the Soul Principle, for the Soul is the centre of our being, and so too is it the central principle in the System of Plotinus.

"The Soul is in the Centre, not at the Summit, of Plotinus' philosophy. It stands between the phenomenal world, of which it is the principle, and the world of Spirit, which is its principle."—(W. R. Inge in "The Philosophy of Plotinus.")

The Soul has the potentiality of verging either downwards or upwards, that is, speaking metaphorically, descending to Body or ascending to Spirit. It is not itself any of the things it contacts or uses: it is not body, or feeling, or thought, or even will: neither is it Spirit. There are no words that can adequately describe it.

"The Soul of man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs: it is not a function like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison, but uses these as hands and feet: it is not a faculty . . . it is the background of our being in which all faculties lie."—(Emerson in "Oversoul.")

"The Soul is not only an intermediary between Appearance and Reality, it is the point where all converging and diverging lines meet; it binds extremes together and it is in vital correspondence with every region to which these lines lead. Within the soul all metaphysical principles are represented. It touches every grade in the hierarchies of value and existence, from the super-essential Absolute to the infra-essential Matter. It has its own centre, a life proper to itself, but it can expand infinitely in every direction without ceasing to be itself."—(W. R. Inge in "Plotinus.")

TABLE I.—THE PLOTINIAN PRINCIPLES.

- (1) THE ONE AND THE GOOD,—the Absolute, Supreme God.
- (2) NOUS,—the Spiritual World, Spiritual Life and Essence—called "Yonder" by Plotinus.

(3) SOUL,—the Over-Soul, or World Soul and the Human Soul.

(4) NATURE, } the Sensible World, called "Here" by
 (5) MATTER, } Plotinus.

The World Soul and the Human Soul.

The human Soul can attain a knowledge of itself by knowing and realizing its relationship with the Universal or World Soul. The following passage, which is one of the finest in the "Enneads," explains this:—

"The Soul ought first to examine its own nature, to know whether it has the faculty of contemplating spiritual things, and whether it has indeed an eye wherewith to see them, and if it ought to embark on the quest. If the Spiritual is foreign to it, what is the use of trying? But if there is a kinship between us and it, we both can and ought to find it.

"First then let every Soul consider that it is the World Soul which created all things, breathing into them the breath of life,—into all living things which are on earth, in the air, and in the sea, and the stars in heaven, the sun and the great heaven itself. The Creative World Soul sets them in their order and directs their motions, keeping Itself apart from the things which it orders and moves and causes to live. The Divine Creative World Soul must be more honourable than they, since they are born and persist as the Over-Soul grants them life . . . but the Over-Soul lives for ever and never ceases to be Itself.

"But how is life imparted in the whole and in individuals? The Great Over-Soul, or World Soul, must be contemplated by another Soul, (*i.e.* the human,—so-called) which is itself no small thing, but one that makes itself worthy to contemplate the Great Soul by ridding itself, through quiet recollection, of deceit and of all that bewitches vulgar souls. For it, let all be quiet: not only the body which encompasses it, and the tumult of the senses; but let all its environment be at peace. Let the earth be quiet and the sea and air and the heaven itself be calm. Let it observe how the Great Soul flows in from all sides into the resting world; pours itself into it, penetrates it and illumines it. Even as the bright beams of the Sun enlighten a dark cloud and give it a golden border, so the Soul, when it enters into the body of the heaven gives it life and immortality and awakens it from sleep. So the world guided in an eternal movement by the Divine Soul which directs it with intelligence, becomes a living and a blessed being, and the heaven, after the Soul has made it her habitation, becomes a thing of worth, after being, before the advent of the Soul, a dead body, mere earth

and water or rather darkness of Matter. . . . The power and nature of the Soul are revealed still more clearly if we consider how it encompasses and guides the heaven by its own Will. It gives Itself to every point in this vast Body and vouchsafes Its Being to every part, great and small, though these parts are divided in space and manner of disposition, and though some are opposed to each other, others dependent on each other. But the World Soul is not divided, nor does it split Itself up in order to give life to each individual. All things live by the Soul in its entirety. It is all present everywhere like the Spirit (Nous) which begat it, both in its unity and in its universality. The heaven, vast and various as it is, is one by the power of the Soul, and by it is this universe of ours Divine. The Sun too is Divine, being the abode of Soul, and so are the stars: and we ourselves, if we are worth anything, are so on account of the Soul." . . . "Now our Soul is of one form with the World Soul, and if we remove from it all that is adventitious, and consider it in its state of purity, we will see how precious the essence of the Soul is; far more precious than anything bodily." . . . "Since then the Soul is so precious and Divine a thing; by it we can attain to union with the Spirit, and with it raise ourselves to the Supreme." ("Ennead," v. 1. 3.)

Before passing on to a consideration of the principles which are, in metaphysical language, above Soul, we will touch on the two principles which Plotinus places below Soul.

Nature and Matter.

"Plotinus often speaks of 'Here' and 'Yonder' as if they were two countries," but not in the dualistic sense; the former is the World of Sense, embracing Nature and Matter; the latter is the World of Spirit embracing Spiritual Life and Spiritual Essence,—the one is the 'Below' and the other the 'Above.'

The World of Sense is created by the Over-Soul in accordance with patterns or 'ideas,' or archetypes residing in the Spiritual World.

"There is nothing 'Yonder' which cannot be found 'Here'" ("Enn., v. 9. 13). And, "all things Here that have 'ideas,' i.e. that represent some 'thought' in the Divine Mind, have a secure abiding-place 'Yonder.' It is only things contrary to Nature that have no place in the Spiritual World" (v. 9. 10.)

Matter, as a principle in the Plotinian System, is not merely dense physical substance, but rather is it the recipient of

forms,—and these forms may be divine or human, visible or invisible. "Matter is matter only in relation to that which is 'above' it and which gives it form, meaning and definite existence." It has no permanent subsistence as 'a thing in itself,' but is always becoming something else. It is not evil, but only becomes so by a perversion of the authentic laws of Nature. It is an essential factor in every involving and evolving process, and may be regarded as the indispensable lower end of each upward progress, or rather the exterior of every interior activity.

"The Sensible World is the creation of the World Soul, through the medium of Nature which is its moving power. Nature is the active faculty of the World Soul, its outer life, the expansion of its energy, On the other hand, Nature is the activity of Matter, gives it its substantiality, and without which Matter is mere abstraction and nonentity."—(W. R. Inge in "Plotinus.")

Matter is always the inferior or secondary element in every manifestation,—it is the effect of each cause, and hence it is that there could be no cosmos without Matter; and hence likewise that "there is such a thing as 'Divine Matter,' which in receiving its proper form, has a definite Spiritual life, *i.e.*, it is enriched and glorified by the Spirit which is infused into it and which gives it a place within Real Being."—*Ibid.*

From the lower levels of manifestation Matter is dead and dark, but 'Yonder' where the Eternal 'forms' abide, Matter is no longer matter, but is Spiritual essence or substance.

"*To know* is the same as *to be*: and the knowledge of immaterial things is identical with the things known. Thus Spirit and the Real World are one. Spirit contains all things in itself, not locally, but as it possesses itself. Yonder all things are together and yet remain distinct, even as the Soul may possess many sciences."—*Ibid.*

Nous,—Spirit and the Spiritual World.

"In the Spiritual World, all the faculties of the Soul must be transmuted to suit eternal conditions. There can be no reasoning Yonder; a constant activity takes the place of dubitative reasoning" (iv. 3. 18). "In the Spiritual World all is Logos and Wisdom" (iii. 3. 5). "The calm of the Spirit (Nous) is not an ecstatic condition, but a state of activity" (iii. 8. 8). When Soul verges

to Spirit, it becomes, so to speak, "the Matter of Spirit" (iii. 9. 3) in other words, it makes itself the passive instrument of Spirit by turning its gaze steadily to God and Heaven. When it thus turns to God, it finds that 'there is nothing between' (iv. 4. 2). "It comes to Spirit, is moulded by Spirit, nor does it lose its individuality or its self-consciousness, though it is one and the same with the world of Spirit, and from this blessed state it will not change" (iv. 4. 2).

"In ascending to Spirit, the Soul loses itself in order to find itself again. We present ourselves a living sacrifice, not to death, but to life." (W. R. Inge in "Plotinus.")

The Nous or Spirit is analogous to the Logos-Christ and is the medium or Mediator between the Soul and God, even as the Soul in turn is the medium between Spirit and Matter.

The ONE and the GOOD.

"The Soul does not aspire to Spirit alone; Spirit is not our Supreme end" (vi. 7. 22). True life and true Spirit are identical, and come from the GOOD,—as Plotinus terms the Supreme God. The Spiritual World is the realm of the highest existence, but the GOOD is beyond existence, and the Cause of it. The Spiritual World is also the realm of all perfections and beauty, but the Supreme One is the BEAUTIFUL Itself, infinitely transcending our loftiest conceptions of beauty. "The Flower of all that is beautiful,—the Beauty above Beauty" (vi. 7, 8). Again, the Spiritual World is the Plain of Truth,—but the Absolute One is The TRUTH itself, Infinite, Eternal and never to be fathomed by finite means.

The highest forms in which the Soul can participate in Spiritual Reality are in the Goodness, Truth and Beauty of the Supreme, as they are manifested in their myriads of aspects in the Spiritual World, which is a realm of everlasting life, and ceaseless creativeness.

"It is the GOOD which fills the vision of Spirit (Nous); for if Spirit were the ONE Itself what occasion would there be for it either to see or energeise in any respect?" (iii. 8).

"Spirit (Nous) indeed is beautiful and the most beautiful of all intelligible things, being situated in a pure light and a pure splendour and comprehending in Itself the nature of all existence

and true being, of which indeed this our beautiful material world is but the shadow and image; but as he who diligently surveys the heavens and contemplates the splendour of the stars, should immediately think upon and search after their Artificer, so it is requisite that he who beholds and admires the Spiritual World, should diligently enquire after its Author, investigating Who HE is and how HE produced such an Offspring as Spirit (Nous), a Son beautiful and pure and full of His Ineffable Fire. But His father is not Spirit but superior to it; for Spirit has a posterior subsistence and is indigent of nourishment and intelligence, being situated next in order to That Nature which is superior to every kind of want. Spirit possesses true plenitude and Spiritual Intelligence because it possesses the first of all intelligible things, but That which is prior to Spirit is neither indigent upon anything else nor possessed by anything, for if this were the case it would not be the *Supreme GOOD Itself* " (iii. 8).

Thus does the divine Plotinus conduct the mystic upwards and inwards ascending from that which is ' Here ' and leading him stage by stage through all realms of consciousness ' Yonder ' until he arrives at that Great Principle about which no words can truly be uttered.

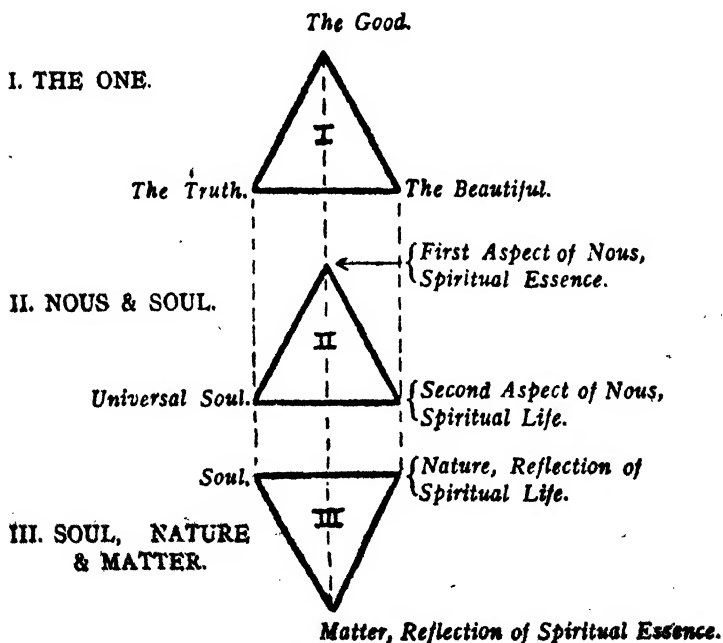
"THE SYSTEM OF PLOTINUS"

§ 3. DIAGRAMMATICAL SYNTHESIS.

THE Charts below illustrate in a convenient form the relationships of the various Plotinian Principles.

They constitute a key to the whole System as herein developed and evince its essentially threefold character.

The inverted triangles in every case represent reflections, extensions or correlations of the principles indicated by the upright triangles.



Soul, as a Self-motive Unity.

IV. SOUL.

*As a Self-
subsistent Form
Creator.*

*As a Body
of Types.*

V. SENSIBLE
WORLD.

*As a Self-vital
Plural-Unity.*

As a Body of Lives.

*As a Body of
Existences.*

As Contemplation.

VI. NATURE

As Form.

As Generation.

*As a Recipient
of Form.*

As a Recipient of Life.

VII. MATTER.

As a Recipient of Order.

Via the GOOD.

VIII. THE THREE
PATHS.

Via the TRUTH.

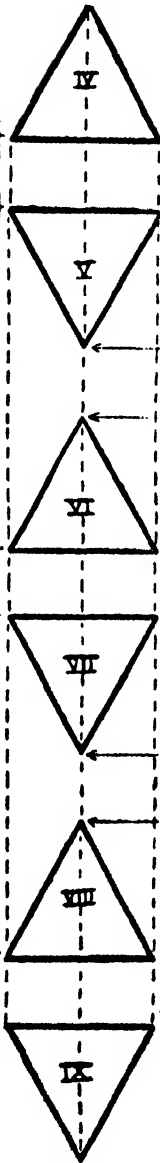
Via the BEAUTIFUL.

The Mind.

The Heart.

IX. THE THREE
SOUL FACUL-
TIES.

The Will.



"THE SYSTEM OF PLOTINUS"

§ 4. "The PLOTINIAN TRINITY."

"**A**LL things are three and three is everywhere,"—there is a beginning, a middle and an end; there is the abiding, the proceeding and the returning; there is the unity, and the duality which proceeds from it when it manifests, and unity plus duality makes a trinity,—hence as the Pythagoreans say: "all things are three and three is everywhere."

The Teaching of Plotinus regarding the Trinity was derived from Plato and other masters. As he himself states:

"It is no new doctrine, it was held in the earliest times although without being explicitly developed: we desire only to be in this matter the interpreters of the wise men of old and to show by the evidence of Plato that they held the same views as ourselves." (Ennead, v. 1, 8.)

To Plotinus the Trinity represented Three Divine Hypostases—an hypostasis being a subsistent or substantial principle, that which stands under—and they constitute the three underlying Principles of all existence.

The First Divine Hypostasis or Principle is the ONE and the GOOD; the Second Divine Hypostasis is NOUS, or Intellect, which is best translated as Spirit; the Third Divine Hypostasis is the All-Soul, or Creative World Soul.

It is an axiom with Plotinus that every Being or Principle tends necessarily to produce an image of itself (iv. 5, 7)—the Second and Third of these Divine Principles are accordingly to be viewed as manifestations or emanations of the First and Second respectively. The First is designated the ONE as being the Source and Cause of all, and the GOOD as being the Goal and End of all. It is poetically likened by Plotinus to a stream which is its own source (iii. 8, 9), whose derivative waves flow centrifugally in all directions, but which continues nevertheless, to subsist immutably in and for itself. The First Divine Hypostasis transcends all known attributes, transcends even the 'idea' of existence and is known alone by

its first Image, Nous or Spiritual Intelligence. The Third in order of dignity of the Divine Hypostases—the World Soul—is the image of the Second even as that is the Image of the First, but differs from its principle in that it is conceived of, in a metaphysical sense, as perpetually revolving about and within the Sphere of Spiritual Intelligence (ii. 9, 1).

Although the Three Principles are conceivable as Three Aspects of One Supreme Deity, the Triad or Trinity being sometimes referred to as “The Divinity,” *i.e.*, a Unity—yet inasmuch as the Second and Third are Emanations or Irradiations and are dependent upon the First, they are not absolutely co-equal and con-substantial with the Supreme, and therefore in this respect are not analogous to the Christian Trinity; but nevertheless the general characteristics of the Three Persons of the Holy Christian Trinity will be found to correspond very closely with those of Plotinus’ Three Divine Hypostases.

Briefly the Plotinian Triple Divinity is: (1) God as the Absolute; (2) God as the Archetypal Image or Logos, and (3) God as The Creator Lord.

THE FIRST DIVINE HYPOSTASIS.

Appellations:—The ONE, The GOOD, the TRUTH, the BEAUTIFUL, the Absolute, the Father, the Supreme, GOD.

The First Cause is called the ONE, as being that whence all numbers spring; “it is not one of the units which make up the number two” (v. 5, 4), but the Unity of all Unities, the Principle of Principles, the “ONE” of all things, and yet the ONE prior to all.

The ONE was, for Plotinus as for Plato and all the Great Sages, absolutely ineffable, and no words can be found to describe It. We can say what It is not, but not what It is. After ascribing to It the highest attributes conceivable we must add—“yet not these, but something greater.”

The ONE is the First Cause of all causes: the GOOD is the Final Cause of all that is or ever will be.

“The GOOD is Unity as the Goal of Desire” (vi. 8, 7). “The Absolute Principle is the GOOD Itself, which all things desire. It is requisite therefore that It abides immutably, converting all things to Itself, just as the circle revolves about the centre, from which all the lines flow and to which they tend. An example to us is the

sun which is as it were a centre to light which emanates from it and at the same time is attached to it. Indeed light everywhere co-exists with the sun and is nowhere separated from it : even if you should wish to sunder it into parts nevertheless light will remain concentrated in the sun" (i. 7, 1).

It must be remembered that the 'circles,' 'centres' and 'suns' are used only as metaphors. "The ONE does not strive to encircle us, but we may strive to encircle It." All things exist because they are 'one'—"for what would they be if they were not one" (vi. 9, 1), and in virtue of partaking of a conscious oneness they possess the potentiality of union with the ONE as well as with the All.

"The goal of the intellect is the ONE; the goal of the will is the GOOD : the goal of the affections is the BEAUTIFUL." (W. R. Inge).

The Transcendence of the Supreme One is made very clear in Plotinus and yet at the same time the Immanence of the Supreme is also clearly postulated.

"The One could not be alone : if It were, all things would remain hidden, having no form in the One" (v. 3, 10).

"There is a mysterious power which impels each nature to create and go on creating down to the lowest limit of existence. Why should we suppose that the ONE would remain standing still in Itself? (v. 4, 1).

"The creation is a kind of overflow of the ONE" (v. 2, 1).

"It is like the efflux of light and heat from the sun-which loses nothing in imparting itself" (v. 1, 6). "The existence of the world is due to the necessity of there being 'a second nature'" (iii. 2, 2). "If there were no necessity for each principle 'to give of its own to another,' the GOOD would not be the GOOD, Spirit would not be Spirit, and Soul would not be Soul" (ii. 9, 3).

"Without Spirit, the ONE would have no object for Its activities : it would be alone and deserted, and unprolific. For activity is not possible in a being which has no inner multiplicity, unless it acts on another" (iv. 3, 6).

THE SECOND DIVINE HYPOSTASIS.

Plotinus' name for the Second Principle is "Nous," which has no exact English equivalent. It is variously translated as "Intellect," or "Reason," but the manner in which these terms are used nowadays render them unsuitable for conveying an adequate and true conception of what Plotinus intends.

to signify by "Nous." The best equivalent, although not literally correct, is "Spirit."

Nous can be regarded as signifying Spirit and the Spiritual World, or, as Spiritual Essence and Spiritual Life. Nous or the Logos is the First Emanation from the ONE, It is His Image as the First Thinker, and inseparable from the Thinker are His First Thoughts which subsist in the Spiritual World. The "Thoughts" of God, which Plato and Plotinus called "Ideas" or Spiritual Prototypes, are the Eternal Realities of all that is manifested or manifestible.

Every Thought of Spirit is an Eternal Form or Being or Idea :—

" Spirit embraces all the Ideas as the whole includes all the parts. Each Idea is Spirit, and Spirit is the totality of the Ideas. The Kingdom of the Ideas is the True Reality, the True Beauty. They are unity in diversity, and diversity in unity " (vi. 5, 6).

As these Ideas are Spiritual they are formless from the finite point of view, although they are phenomenal to the ONE. They are causal and fontal wholenesses from which all manifestation and differentiation spring.

They are the potential Perfections of all Ideals which are made actual by the energies of the Divine All-Soul and become realized Perfections when that which is manifested returns to its Source.

"Spirit not only engenders all things : it is all things" (vi. 7, 13).

This Great Spirit, or Nous, is the same as the Logos, or Word, the Voice of God which calls all things into existence, and which Itself causes them to be ensouled; the Word is thus made incarnate, and yet remains the Word. Each manifestation of the Spirit, or aspect of the Logos, exists both in itself and in the wholeness of Nous, "which is the totality of all Spiritual Ideas in actuality and each of them potentially."

"After having admired the world of sense, its grandeur and beauty, the regularity of its movement . . . we may rise to the archetype of this world, a world more real than ours is : we may there contemplate all the Spiritual objects which are of their own nature eternal and which subsist in their own knowledge and life, and the pure Spirit which presides over them and the infinite Wisdom and the True Kingdom of Nous " (v. 1, 5).

"It is necessary," as W. R. Inge reminds us, "for us to be carefully on our guard against interpreting the Neoplatonic 'Yonder' as merely the *future* life. It is intimately bound up with present experience. Every worthy object of human activity . . . belongs at least in part to the Eternal World" (v. 9, 11). "Spirit is the *universal* element in all worthy occupations. Spirituality means a persistent attitude of mind, which will never be immersed in the particular instance" (W. R. Inge in Plotinus).

"Nothing which can ever die was ever born. Our true Self is a denizen of the Eternal World. Its Home is in the Sphere of eternal and unchanging activity Yonder, even while it energizes in the execution of finite but Divine purposes Here below" (W. R. Inge).

But in order to realize that eternal life and become a conscious and active participant in It, it is requisite for the Immortal Soul to be associated first with that which is mortal, finite and transient ere it can learn to recognize Eternity, the Infinite and the Spirit which will unite it to the Supreme.

THE THIRD DIVINE HYPOSTASIS.

PSYCHE, the All-Soul, World Soul, Universal Soul, the Creator, the Demiurgus.

The Divine Soul in the Plotinian System is *Creative* but not *created*. It is an eternal emanation or extension of Spirit and is therefore co-eternal with it. But it is not *co-equal* with Spirit else it would *be* Spirit, and could not be contemplated as proceeding from and returning to Spirit. The distinction between the Two Principles from one point of view is this—all that proceeds from and returns to Spirit is co-eternal with It—is *uncreated*; but that which proceeds from Soul is not co-eternal with it, being created, and therefore, having a future, is in a continual state of *becoming*. The Image of Spirit is Soul; the Image of Soul is Nature, which is created by the Soul's outgoing energies, and is the expression of the Divine Soul's (i.e., God as Creator Lord) prolificness.

"The World-Soul always desires to translate what It sees in the Eternal World into another form" (iv. 4, 15).

Thus Nature and Matter and the whole Universe here below have a beginning in Time—and Time is the moving image of Eternity (Plato in "Timaeus").

"Time is the activity of an Eternal Soul, not turned towards itself nor within itself, but exercised in creation and generation " (iii. 7, 12).

The thoughts of the Soul are not eternal Ideas as in the case of Nous, but are creative powers.

"The World of Sense is, as it were, the Shadow of Soul cast by the Sun of Spirit. The Soul is the offspring of Spirit . . . and as an image of Spirit, it resembles its Principle closely. But while on one side it is closely attached to Spirit, of which it is the effluence, on the other it touches the phenomenal World. Soul is still a part of the Divine World, though the lowest part " (v 1, 7). "Soul is distinguished from Spirit not by being localised, but, among other things, by the presence of unfulfilled desires in Soul, Spirit being free from all desires " (W. R. Inge).

"Soul, as an activity proceeding from Spirit, is in labour to create after the pattern which it sees in Spirit and from this desire the whole World arises and takes shape " (iv. 7, 13).

Soul is only separated from Spirit as word is from thought, as activity from power.

"It is the nature of Soul to look both up and down " (iv. 8, 8).

"And so to be the intermediary between Spirit and the World that we know. The Soul has its own proper place in this intermediate sphere." (iv. 8, 3.)

"The World Soul is not in the world : rather the world is in It, embraced by It and moulded by It." (W. R. Inge.)

"It is not only the Creator of the World, but the providence which watches over it. Universal Providence consists in the fact that the World is framed in the Image of the Spiritual World " (iii. 2).

Briefly recapitulating then what has been postulated concerning the Three Divine Hypostases : -

The First is the ONE and the GOOD ; the Absolute ; the Causeless Cause ; the Unity of unities ; the ONE of all things and yet the ONE prior to all.

The Second is NOUS, Spirit and the Spiritual World ; Spiritual Essence and Spiritual Life ; the Archetypal Image or Logos, Eternal, Immutable, Infinite ; the Realm of Ideas and Ideals ; the Highest Heaven and the Word that will never pass away.

The Third is the OVERSOUL or World Soul ; the proximate Creator of the Manifested universe—all that is Here—and the Eternal Providence thereof, moving all things onwards and ultimately upwards.

"THE SYSTEM OF PLOTINUS"

§ 5. "THE SPIRITUAL WORLD, OR NOUS."

IN these days when such a multitude of theories abound concerning the nature of Spirit, of Spirituality, and of the Spiritual World generally, it may be especially interesting to consider the significance assigned by Plotinus to those transcendental realms where Nous is the ruling principle.

We must not expect, however, from such a brief consideration as is here given, to gain an adequate conception of this lofty principle. Plotinus was just as conscious as was Plato of the total inadequacy of human language to describe, except in imagery, those realms of Reality which, according to them, are to be glimpsed only in rare moments of exalted contemplation.

Many of the statements of Plotinus are paradoxical, and at times they seem even incoherent. But paradoxes may express or suggest subtle truths which escape precise definition. Moreover, the reflection induced is sometimes productive of intuitive flashes in which indefinable Ideas take the place of definitions.

TABLE II.—NOUS, THE SECOND DIVINE HYPOSTASIS.

I. DEFINITIONS.

- (1) Spirit and the Spiritual World;
- (2) Spiritual Being or Be-ness and Spiritual Energy;
- (3) Spiritual Essence and Spiritual Life;
- (4) The Intelligible-Intellectual Principle;
- (5) "Yonder," the Realm of Ideas and Archetypes.

II. CHARACTERISTICS.

- (1) Eternal in Being and Essence.
- (2) Eternal in Energy and Activity.
- (3) Indivisible and Universal.
- (4) Self-gnostic; the Home of Wisdom.

III. REALIZATION.

- (1) Macrocosmic.
- (2) Microcosmic.

I. DEFINITIONS.

(1) Spirit and the Spiritual World.

As previously explained the term "Spirit" is by no means a true or adequate metaphysical equivalent to the word "Nous"—and so, as a translation, the English word falls far short in significance. "Nous" embraces both Spiritual Essence and Spiritual Life—both Being and Energy.

The term "world" is here an expression in mystical cosmology signifying a plane, a realm or a state of subsistence or existence.

(2) Spiritual Being or Be-ness and Spiritual Energy.

According to Plotinus the ONE is beyond the very idea of Being. But Nous is Being Itself—the First Being—the Image of Be-ness.

Again, the ONE is exempt in transcendency and is therefore beyond all energy. It is ineffably immovable. But Nous, comprehending the first full emanation of the Godhead, is the very plenum of Spiritual Energy.

Being is static. Energy is dynamic. Hence it can be seen how the World of Nous is at once the World of Potentiality and of Actuality, and how, in a causal sense, duality begins in the Spiritual World.

(3) Spiritual Essence and Spiritual Life.

Nous is the causal undifferentiated essence and the fontal life of all things "to be." It is that which makes it possible for all things, germinally, to abide in, proceed from and return to their Source.

(4) The Intelligible-Intellectual Principle.

"We call Nous the Image of the ONE. Let us explain this. It is His Image because Intelligence is in a certain respect begotten by Unity : because Intelligence possesses much of the nature of the Father, and because it resembles Him as Light resembles the Sun." (v. 1, 7.)

It not only IS, but knows it is.

"It does not become knowing after being ignorant. It is always active and always Spirit" (v. 9, 5).

It is the Logos of Wisdom itself.

(5) "Yonder," the Realm of Ideas and Archetypes.

The Spiritual World "Yonder" is the realm of all ideas, ideals and archetypes.

Every Idea is an eternal activity in Spirit. Ideas are infinite and cannot therefore be expressed fully here below. They are the unparticularized prototypes of all that is, has been or ever will be.

II. CHARACTERISTICS.

(1) Nous is Eternal in Being and Essence, having no beginning but existing from all eternity. It is uncreate and unborn.

"In the case of created things if you take away their future you take away their existence which consists in continual growth; but in things that are not created you cannot apply the idea of futurity without ousting them from their position in Reality, for they could not belong originally to the world of Real Being if their life consisted in a becoming and in the future The blessed Beings which are in the highest rank have not even any desire for the future, for they are already all that it is their nature to be" (iii. 7, 3).

(2) Nous is Eternal in Energy and Activity, but this activity must not be judged from the finite standpoint else erroneous conceptions will arise. It is spiritual and can be discerned only by spiritual faculties. The activity of Nous is not directly in Matter, although there would be no activity in Matter without it. Soul is the intermediary principle, which is eternal in essence, like Spirit, but temporal in energy like Nature, thus it touches both.

Nous is only inactive or apparently absent inasmuch as the Soul is not consciously aware of it, but it is ever present and ceaselessly active.

"Eternal activity is a sublime thing: it is identical with God. . . . it is Being in its calmness, its self-identity, its permanent life. We must not be surprised to find plurality in Nous, for everything 'Yonder' is multiple on account of its infinite power" (iii. 7, 36).

(3) Nous is Indivisible and Universal.

"Eternal Being is not divided. It subsists ever in the same manner and in the same state; neither is born, nor perishes; occupies neither place nor space; does not reside in any determinate locality; neither enters, nor issues, but remains in itself" (vi. 5, 3).

It is not subject to evolution else it could not be the perfection of evolving things.

"Since it never departs from itself,—as it is never divided, as it subsists within all things simultaneously, without undergoing any change, as it exists within itself, one and simultaneously entire,—it must, while existing in several things, remain everywhere identical, that is, everywhere entire, both *in* itself and *out* of itself" (vi. 5, 3).

"Spirit possesses all things at all times simultaneously . . . It is: it knows no past or future. All things in the Spiritual World co-exist in an Eternal Now. Each of them is Spiritual Being and Spiritual Life, taken together they are universal essence and life" (v. 1, 4).

"Considering its universality Nous contains all entities as the genus contains all species; as the whole contains all the parts" (v. 9, 6).

"Nous actually constitutes all beings. It contains them all but not locally. It contains them as it possesses itself" (v. 9, 6).

"If Universal Being were in a place, our world should (instead of having a circular motion) rush towards it in a straight line, touching different parts of this Being by different parts of its own, and find itself, on one side distant from It and on the other side near It . . . But Nous is entirely present to all things that are able to receive It" (vi. 4, 2).

(4) Nous is Self-Gnostic.

"Since It thinks of itself and by itself, It itself is what It thinks. If we could distinguish between its subsistence and its thought (activity) its 'being' would be unintelligent. It would be potentiality but not also actuality" (v. 9, 5).

Soul in contradistinction to Nous, is infinite in potentiality but not in actuality. Hence it is not self-gnostic until it is conscious of Spirit.

"Spirit perceives, not as one that seeks, but as one that already possesses" (v. 1, 4).

"Reality is that which is seen, not the act of seeing" (vi. 2, 8).

Nous is all that really exists. In possessing itself in constancy, it is the plenitude of all things.

Plotinus warns us that—

"We must not regard the objects of Spiritual perception as things exterior to Spirit, nor as impressions stamped upon it. Thus denying to Spirit the immediate possession of Truth. To do so

would be to condemn Nous of ignorance in Spiritual things and to destroy the reality of Spirit itself. If we wish to maintain the possibility of Knowledge and of Truth and of the Reality of True Existence and the Knowledge of what each thing is,—instead of confining ourselves to the simple notion of its qualities which only gives us an image of the object and forbids us possessing it—to unite ourselves with it and become one with it, we must allow to true Spirit the possession of everything. So only can it know and know truly and never forget or wander in search, and the Truth will be in It, and Reality will abide with It, and It will live and know " (v. 2, 2).

III. REALIZATION.

Intellectuality counts for little unless it contributes towards realization. But if Real Being were knowable without any intellectual effort, it would not be an object of realization.

Nous is the Ideal Realm both macrocosmically and microcosmically, and to realize It is to be one consciously with Reality.

" Nous, in beholding Reality, beholds Itself, and in beholding enters into Its proper activity, and this activity is Itself " (v. 3, 5).

(1) Macrocosmically, Nous is the Kingdom of absolute verities, permanent values, primal and ultimate attributes. It is phenomenal to the Infinite ONE but noumenal to the finite Many. In it is the Archetypal World where everything subsists in perfect harmony and integrality.

There is an analogy or parallelism between the macrocosm " Yonder " and the microcosm " Here "; the latter being, as it were, a dim reflection of the former.

Every Spiritual Idea or Archetype is an infinite potentiality and therefore productive of infinite effects.

The world " Here " is the sum total of these differentiated effects, each of which is able to manifest but a limited aspect of its infinite prototype.

For instance, the Idea of " Treeness " is the producing cause of an infinite number and variety of trees. But all the individual trees conceivable do not exhaust the One Idea of Treeness.

And thus too with all other things. " Here " they are in part, particularized, and separated, but " There " they are perfect, universal and united.

(2) Microcosmically, Nous contains the one, primal, perfect, archetype of Humanity.

"Nous contains the Ideas of universals; the Idea of Man as such and not of individual men" (v. 9, 12).

This Universal Idea is in the Image of God, it is the Eternal Word or Logos which is ever becoming flesh and is realizable to all who make it possible.

It is man's spiritual paradigm through which alone can he know God.

"In knowing God, Nous knows itself, for it will know what it receives from Him; what God has given to it and can give. In knowing this it knows itself, for it is itself one of God's Gifts, or rather the sum total of them all.

"If then Spirit will know Him and His Powers, it will know itself as having come from Him and having derived from Him all that it is.

"If It cannot see Him clearly it is because Seer and Seen are the same. For this reason Spirit will know and see itself, because *to see Spiritually is to become oneself the thing seen*" (v. 3, 7).

And for such who win this wondrous realization—

"A blissful life is theirs. They have the Truth for Mother, Nurse and Nutriment: they see all things: not the things that are born and die, but those which have Real Being and they see themselves in others. For them, all things are transparent and there is nothing dark or impenetrable, but everyone is manifest to everyone interiorly and all things are manifest to the most intimate depth of their nature. Light is everywhere manifest to light. There, everyone has all things in himself and sees all things in others, so that all things are everywhere and all is all and each is all, and the glory is infinite" (v. 8, 4).

"THE SYSTEM OF PLOTINUS"

§ 6. "THE SOUL."

THROUGHOUT the Enneads, the nature of the Soul is a theme of cardinal consideration. Even when dealing with other Principles, Plotinus frequently presents them in the light of the Soul. Therefore, to understand the Plotinian conception of Soul is to possess a key to the whole System.

Previously we have made a distinction between the World Soul and the Human Soul, but now, except where otherwise indicated, whatever is postulated applies equally to both.

TABLE III.—THE SOUL, THE THIRD DIVINE HYPOSTASIS.

I. DEFINITIONS.

- (1) A Centre.
- (2) A Unity.
- (3) A Plural-Unity, "one-manyness."
- (4) A Form Creator.
- (5) A Self-motive Principle.
- (6) A Self-vital Principle.
- (7) A Self-subsistent Principle.

II. CHARACTERISTICS.

- (1) Universal.
- (2) Essentially Pure.
- (3) Perpetually Active.
- (4) Incorporeal.
- (5) Infinite.
- (6) Indivisible.
- (7) Indestructible.

III. RELATIONSHIPS.

- (1) With Secondary Natures,—“Here.”
- (2) With Similar Natures,—other Souls.
- (3) With Primary Natures,—“Yonder.”

I. DEFINITIONS.

(1) The Soul is a Centre. It is a focussing point for manifestation. It matters not what aspect of Soul is considered, it is still a centre of activity, of consciousness, and of subsistence. It never departs from the centre, but perpetually retains this relationship with all things. Neither time, nor space, nor motion can affect it.

But—

"When we speak of the Soul as a Centre we must not understand the term in the same sense as when applied to the body. For the Soul, though a Centre, is the focus of Nous whence it radiates " (ii. 2, 2).

(2) The Soul is a Unity. It is not *the* UNITY, for That is the ONE, but it is *a* unity, which

"imparts unity without being *the* unity " (vi. 9, 1).

It is an immutable Oneness in essence, and, because of this, always possesses the potentiality of union with other natures.

Each of the secondary natures depending upon Soul is one, and receives oneness through the Soul principle. The Soul causes all its parts to unite and sympathize into a complete wholeness.

"The Soul is one and its work is one it abides unchanged in one and the same work " (iv. 4, 10).

But—

"If the Soul were absolutely One, essentially indivisible, and one within itself, if its nature were incompatible with manifoldness and division, it could not, when animating the body, animate it in its entirety.

"The Soul, therefore, must be simultaneously one and manifold, divided and undivided."

"By its manifold unity it unifies all parts of the universe, while its indivisible unity directs everything with wisdom" (iv. 2, 2).

Therefore

(3) The Soul is a Plural-Unity, one in essence, but plural in activity. Moreover—

"The unity of Souls does not exclude the plurality of Souls, any more than the unity of essence excludes the plurality of beings.

"Individual Souls exist in the universal (world) Soul, not potentially but each in actuality. The unity of the universal Soul does not hinder the multitude of the individual Souls contained within it. Neither does the multitude of individual Souls hinder the unity of the universal Soul. They are distinct without being separated by any interval. They are present to each other instead of being foreign to each other, for they are not separated from each other by any limits any more than different sciences are within a single Soul " (vi. 4, 4).

"Souls are one without being identical because of their activity" (iv. 9, 8).

"All Souls are potentially all things. Each of them is characterized by the faculty principally exercised " (iv. 3, 8).

For instance :—

"One is united to the Spiritual World by activity, another by thought, another by desire.

"The Souls, contemplating different objects are, or become, identified with that which they contemplate" (iv. 3, 8).

(4) The Soul is a Form Creator.

"The Soul is a yearning to create many forms" (iv. 4, 22).

Perhaps this is the best definition of Soul; subsisting, as it does, between the realm of archetypes and the worlds of form. It is, itself, the principle through which the undifferentiated and unparticularized becomes differentiated and particularized.

It causes the noumenal to become phenomenal, and the potential to become actual, yet remains itself distinct in mediation.

"The Soul produces form and therefore must itself be distinct from form" (iv. 3, 20).

"The Soul that imparts form and figure to bodies is not identical with form and figure . . . It unifies each of its productions by contemplating the ONE, just as it produces Man by contemplating the Idea (or archetype) of Man" (vi. 9, 1).

"Every body is multiple and diverse and yet all things are derived from Unity.

"The Formative Principle is One and is therefore a plurality" (vi. 2, 5).

(5) The Soul is a Self-Motive Principle. It possesses an inherent impulse to manifest, expressing this objectively, just as the Impulse or Will of Nous, is expressed subjectively.

Nous is conceivable as the Principle of Motion, Progression and Emanation; it is therefore immoveable itself.

Soul is conceivable as a "Self-Motive" Principle which causes other natures to be moved, without moving itself, because it transcends all spatial conceptions. It subsists between the Idea or Principle of Motion and those Natures moved by its acts which are called alter-motive, or moved.

"The Soul extends everywhere and subsists as far as it wishes without moving; but it is everywhere with bodies and penetrates them according to its nature" (iv. 3, 8).

"When the body participates in the Soul, the Soul does not go beyond itself to enter the body; on the contrary, the body enters into the Soul. Hence when ancient philosophers say that the Soul comes into the body, this means that the body enters essence and participates in the life of the Soul" (vi. 4, 16).

The Self-motive nature of Soul is its Elective Power or Will, which although originally free becomes conditioned by the consequences of its activity. This free-will has to do with the Soul's so-called descent and fall.

Plotinus asks :—

“What can be the cause that has led Souls to forget God, their Father, and Members of Him though they are, and wholly His, to cease to know both themselves and Him?”

He answers :—

“The evil that has befallen them is due to a ‘rebellious-audacity’ (or self-will) in the manner of their entry into birth, to the primal differentiation and to the desire of Souls to have a life of their own” (v. 3, 9).

(6) The Soul is a Self-Vital Principle, it causes secondary natures to be vitalized.

“The Soul, as looking to the Divine Order, is perfect; going outside of itself into a movement secondary to its primal essence, it engenders an image, which is sensitive and vegetative nature” (v. 2, 1).

The Soul is not life, but rather the self-vital principle that causes its secondary natures to participate in life. The Soul itself is neither involving nor evolving life.

“What the Soul is, it ever will be” (i. 1, 2).

“If the Soul always *is*, the consequence to itself with respect to itself are, the self-motive, the self-vital and the self-subsistent.”—(Thos. Taylor.)

(7) The Soul is a Self-Subsistent Principle. It is not an essence, but rather a self-subsisting formative principle of essence.

Its primal “acts” are triple: (1) the self-motive, or volitional; (2) the self-vital or generative; and (3) the formative. These are represented respectively by the will, the heart and the mind.

The last act, in which the Soul makes the intelligence of *Nous* manifest, is a natural consequence of the self-subsistence of the Soul as an intermediary principle. However, it is not self-subsistent in the same sense as *Nous* is said to be, for the Soul is not primarily self-gnostic, but, as it were, looks to *Nous* when generating secondary natures. These generations are themselves the means whereby the Soul becomes self-gnostic, *i.e.*, conscious of its own self-subsistence.

"As there are two kinds of being, one sensible and the other intelligible (spiritual), it is preferable for the Soul to subsist in the Intelligible world, nevertheless, as a result of its nature it is necessary for the Soul also to participate in the sensible activities since it occupies an intermediate rank. The Soul can rise above body after having learned to perceive things on high, by the experience of things seen and suffered here below and after having appreciated the Truly Good by the comparison of contraries; indeed, the knowledge of the Good becomes clearer by the experience of the privation of Good" (iv. 8, 7).

II. CHARACTERISTICS.

(1) The Soul is Universal, "its centre is everywhere, and its circumference nowhere."

"The Soul, outside all the limits of Space and Time and Magnitude, is able to embrace within its unvarying nature the entire body of the All, and is ever at the furthest and the nearest point which the All includes" (iv. 3, 9).

"The Soul, being one and simple, is everywhere entire (but) it is impossible for a body to be entire in several places simultaneously."

"The Soul cannot increase or diminish without ceasing to be soul" (iv. 7, 5).

"Each soul is universal" (iv. 3, 2).

(2) The Soul is Essentially Pure; it is not *an* essence, but, as an eternal and essential unity, it is immutable and pure. It can never, really, become defiled, although its secondary principles may.

Potentially it is perfect, although not actually so. In this it differs from Nous. Plotinus asks:—

"What do we mean by 'purifying the Soul,' inasmuch as it could not possibly be stained? What do we mean by separating the Soul from the body, since the Soul is said to be everywhere?"

Again, he answers his own questions, paradoxically:—

"To purify the Soul is to isolate it, preventing it from attaching itself to other things."

"To purify the Soul consists in raising it from the things here below to the Spiritual realms. Also, it is to wean it from body, for it is then no longer enslaved by the body" (iii. 6, 5).

(3) The Soul is Perpetually Active. Although it is immutably and essentially One, yet Soul would not be Soul unless it were acting upon other natures.

In other words, being a Plural-Unity, it is always setting up secondary causes and itself entering into relations with the effects of these causes.

Primarily, the causes are three :—

"A free attraction or voluntary inclination ; the law of Necessity proceeding from the nature of Soul ; and thirdly, the inherent impulse of the Soul to bestow order and beauty on the stage of being which is next below itself " (iv. 8, 5).

These three causes correspond to the self-motive, self-vital and self-subsistent principles of the Soul.

And, it should be remembered, all this applies to the human Soul as well as to the universal World Soul.

(4) The Soul is Incorporeal. Its own essential nature is not changed by alliance with secondary corporeal natures, although they are perpetually changed by Soul.

It is formless, yet creates forms. It is intangible, yet, by means of the effects of its activities, *i.e.*, its instruments or vehicles of expression, it contacts other natures.

"It is not a body, has neither figure nor colour, but is impalpable " (iv. 7, 10).

"Soul penetrates the whole body, while an entire body cannot penetrate another entire body.

"If the soul were corporeal and pervaded the whole body, it would form a mixture with the body . . . and would cease to be Soul, even as the sweet ceases to be sweet when it is mingled with the bitter " (iv. 7, 5).

(5) The Soul is Infinite. It can neither be contained in nor comprehended by finite natures, save in so far as its relationships with them are realized.

The Soul is not *the* Infinite, but resembles It in many ways. For instance :—

"The Soul is such that in its unity it is one with all Souls. Such a nature is infinite " (vi. 4, 4).

For it has no limits. In this it is like the ONE. But the limitlessness of Soul is only potential, as well as relative in comparison with the Absolutely Infinite.

(6) The Soul is Indivisible. This can only be explained by paradoxes.

"The Soul is indivisible even when it is divided ; for it is all in all, and all in every part " (iv. 2, 1).

"When Plato says that the Soul is indivisible, he speaks absolutely. When he declares it is divisible he speaks relatively" (iv. 3, 19).

"We must not believe that the plurality of Souls comes from the plurality of bodies. Particular Souls subsist as well as the universal Soul, independently of bodies, without the unity of the universal Soul absorbing the multiplicity of the particular Souls, or of the multiplicity of particular Souls splitting up the unity of the universal."—(Porphyry.)

"The World Soul is not divided, nor does it split itself up in order to give life to each individual thing. All things live by the Soul in its entirety; it is all-present everywhere like the Father Who begot it, both in its unity and in its universality" (v. 1, 3).

"The Soul cannot be divided quantitatively, nor can it have heterogeneous parts or limbs like a body. Individual Souls are not functions of the Universal Soul" (iv. 3, 5).

"It is the body, and not the Soul, which makes the illusory divisions. The Soul, even in its relations with the body, is only in appearance divided" (iv. 2, 1).

"It never loses its intercourse with the universal Soul.

"All souls are one" (vi. 5, 9).

(7) The Soul is Indestructible, it neither comes into existence nor can it pass out, in the absolute sense. It is eternally self-subsistent.

"All that dissolves, existing only by its compositeness, can naturally dissolve in the same manner that it became composite.

"But the Soul is a single, simple actualization, whose essence is immutable. Not in this manner, therefore, can the Soul perish. Neither could the Soul perish by division into a number of parts, for, as we have seen, the Soul is neither a mass, nor a quantity. As little could the Soul perish by alteration, for when alteration destroys anything, it may remove its form but it leaves its matter; alteration, therefore, is a characteristic of something composite.

"Consequently, as the Soul cannot perish in any of these ways, it is indestructible" (iv. 7, 12).

Thus the Soul is immortal; but its purpose is to gain a *self-conscious* immortality by alliance with its Principle—*Nous*.

III. RELATIONSHIPS.

(1) With Secondary Natures—"Here."

All that is "Here," owes its very existence to Soul.

"Nothing that is destitute of Soul can exist" (iv. 5, 7).

That is, using the word "exist" as signifying "to stand out."

The Soul's connexion with these Natures is not necessarily a fall.

"We hear of the Soul's Fall: but why and how and when? If it fell from all eternity, then it is eternally a fallen thing. If we fix a time, why not earlier or later?"

"We hold that the Cosmos was produced by no such fall. The Creation, rather, is due to the Soul's not falling.

"If the Soul fell this could be only by its forgetting its relations with the Supreme; but if it entirely forgot the things that are **"There,"** how could it create the things that are **"Here?"** From what model does it work, but from what it sees **"There?"** If then, it creates from the patterns in Nous, it can never have fallen" (ii. 9, 4).

"The Soul, being naturally divine, descends thither through a certain volutary inclination for the sake of experience, since by this means it receives a knowledge of evil, unfolds its latent powers and exhibits a variety of operations peculiar to its nature, which, by perpetually abiding in an incorporeal habit and never proceeding into activity, would have been bestowed in vain. Moreover, the Soul would have been ignorant of what it possessed" (iv. 8, 5).

In a figurative sense, only, the Soul falls when, through the operations of its own self-will, it forgets for a time its divine origin and identifies itself with that which is but a shadow cast by the Sun of Spirit.

"Human Souls, in beholding their own image in the world, as in a Dionysian mirror, have not abandoned their place in the Divine; for all their descent, they are not cut off from their Principle—Nous" (iv. 3, 12).

It is difficult—even if possible—to explain fully the precise character of the Soul's relations with its vehicles, or secondary principles which constitute its instruments of expression.

It is the creator of them and therefore has a prior subsistence. It cannot, really, be contained in them any more than the Universe can contain its Creator.

"The Soul is not in the body, but the body is enveloped and permeated by the Soul which created it" (iv. 3, 9).

"The Soul is present with the body, but not within it. It remains pure of all admixture and is always itself" (i. 1, 8).

"When the Soul enters into its relations with the body, though universal, it becomes individual, for its activity no longer is according to the universal. It is as if someone, who was (potentially) expert in a whole science, confined himself to a single proposition Likewise, the Soul which belongs entirely to

the Spiritual World withdraws out of the universal and becomes individualized, because the body to which it confines its activities is only a part of the universe.

"It is as if the fire, which is endowed with the power of burning everything, was reduced to burn out some small object, although it possessed power of universal scope.

"Indeed, when the particular Soul is separated from the body, it is no longer particular in actualization, and, on the contrary, when it has separated itself from the universal Soul—not by passing from one locality to another, but by applying its activity to a part of the universe—it becomes particular in actualization, although it remains universal in potentiality.

"When the Soul presides over no particular body, it is truly universal and is particular only in potentiality" (vi. 4, 16).

(2) With Other Souls.

All Souls are equal in essence but not in activity.

There is identity in that which is eternal, but diversity in that which is temporal. Souls are eternal in essence, but temporal in energy.

"The difference between Souls is caused by the constitution of the vehicles they animate, also by the activities engaged in All Souls are potentially all things, and each is characterized by the faculty principally exercised" (iv. 3, 8).

Human Souls are not created by the World Soul for they are one in essence with it, and therefore potentially equal.

They may, however, in a certain sense, be said to proceed from the Universal Soul.

"The universal Soul must be the same everywhere, or, if it is not absolutely everywhere, it must, at least, be in every place entire, without division, as in one and the same body. If we were to suppose that each particular Soul were divided into infinity, the universal Soul would no longer be entire; and, as a result of this division, it would be wholly impotent" (vi. 4, 9).

(3) With Primary Natures,—“Yonder.”

In certain characteristics the Soul resembles its Primary Principle, Nous.

For instance, it is eternal, infinite, indivisible, incorporeal, universal.

In other characteristics it differs, viz., in its activity, and in not being primarily self-gnostic.

"The Soul knows itself truly only when it knows itself as Spirit.

"The highest activity of the Soul is not self-conscious in the ordinary sense, though, in another sense, we may say that Spirit alone is Self-conscious" (v. 3, 14, and v. 8, 11).

"The Soul, in knowing itself, knows that there is something better than itself" (v. 3, 4).

"Soul is beautified by Spirit; other things are beautified by the Soul which gives them form.

"It is the Soul that beautifies bodies to which is ascribed this perfection. Being essentially divine and participating in Beauty, the Soul, when it subjects the body to its dominion, gives to it the beauty that the nature of the body enables it to receive" (i. 6, 6).

"The Soul, brought to its purity, becomes the indwelling imprint of Nous" (v. 3, 6).

"The pure Souls, Yonder, act without premeditation or deliberation. They know each other by a simple intuition, as, even Here, we know our like without speaking, by a mere glance. Yonder, all is pure and transparent. Every Soul is, as it were, an eye. Nothing is hidden or simulated. Before you have spoken, your thought is already known" (iv. 3, 18).

"Light is visible to light. Nous sees itself, and Its light, shining upon Soul, enlightens it and makes it a member of the Spiritual Order" (v. 3, 8).

"The Soul, restored to the likeness (of its archetype) goes to its like and holds of the Supreme all that it can hold . . . This is not to say that in thus plunging into the Divine the Soul reaches nothingness. It is when it is identified with evil that it sinks to nothingness.

"By this way, this, that leads to the GOOD, it finds itself.

"When it is divine, it is truly itself, no longer a thing among things. It abandons being in order to become a Beyond-being . . .

"He who knows himself to have become such, knows himself now as an Image of the Supreme, and when the Image has returned to the Original, the journey is achieved" (vi. 9, 11).

"THE SYSTEM OF PLOTINUS"

§ 7. "THE SENSIBLE WORLD."

THE Sensible World, or "Here" as Plotinus terms it, may be said to incorporate all finite existences that are objective or phenomenal to the Soul Principle and are appreciable to the Natural Senses.

It is the field of Soul activity, even as the Spiritual World is the Kingdom of the Divine Activities of the Father.

The Sensible World is a relative, conditioned and limited reflex of the Spiritual World, for Spiritual Life and Essence have their respective reflections in Nature and Matter which constitute the two root principles of the Sensible World.

TABLE IV. THE SENSIBLE WORLD—"Here."

- (1) A Body of Existences.
- (2) A Body of Lives, Motions and Activities.
- (3) A Body of Types, Images and Reasons.
- (4) Nature—as Contemplation.
- (5) Nature—as Generation.
- (6) Nature—as Form.
- (7) Matter—as the Recipient of Form.
- (8) Matter—as the Recipient of Life.
- (9) Matter—as the Recipient of Order.

(1) A Body of Existences. The Sensible Universe is replete with all-various existences. It is a great body containing lesser bodies. It has a real subsistence of its own without being Reality itself.

"Were our intelligence attentively to listen to the voice of the universe, we would hear it exclaim: 'It is a Divinity Who has made me, and from a divinity's hand I issued complete, including all animated beings, entire and self-sufficient, standing in need of nothing since everything is contained within me—plants, animals and the whole of nature . . .'" (iii. 2, 3).

From one point of view the universe is comparable to an immense vortex which serves as space into which the plenitude of the Divine Nature is for ever overflowing.

"The universe contains all that it needs (to make it a universe) and wastes nothing." (iv. 4, 36).

"This world is worthy of its Author, complete, beautiful and harmonious. Those who find fault with it, make the mistake of considering it in part" (iii. 2, 3).

The Sensible Universe is finite in so far as it is finished and complete, but it is also infinite in the sense that all its finite existences are infinitely prolific.

The totality of these existences constitute the Body of the Universe, which can be said to have a natural proclivity to manifest its own producing principle to the utmost extent possible to a finite nature.

(2) A Body of Lives, Motions and Activities. This great body, like human bodies, is full of life and activity. Nothing, really, is in a state of rest.

"The universe is not a great and vast edifice, inanimate and composed of things of which it would be easy to catalogue the different kinds, such as stones, lumber and ornamental structures. It is a wakeful being, living in all its parts, though differently so in each; in short, it includes all that can ever be" (iv. 4, 36).

In it is ceaselessly expressed the activity of the Creative World Soul.

This activity is characterized by Time.

It is not an eternal activity like that of Nous. The Soul, in its own essence, is supra-spatial and supra-temporal, but in its activities it is, as it were, in need of the Space and Time of the Sensible World "by which it passes from one actualization to another" (iii. 7, 10).

These actualizations may be considered as being born of the Soul's acts. They are generations and, as such, strictly temporal.

"Things that are born yearn to continue in existence because perpetuity is the symbol and copy of the permanence of Eternity, and the effort to make perpetual progress is the symbol and copy of the perfection of Eternity" (W. R. Inge in "Plotinus").

"Time is the life of the Soul as it moves from one manifestation to another" (iii. 7, 11).

Life implies movement, and movement, in turn, implies not only Space, but also Time.

"Time is the measure of a definite finite activity directed to some end beyond itself" (vi. 1, 6).

Movement and activity imply change, growth, increase, decay and all that pertains to generation.

"Time is always different from what it was because it is produced by movement" (vi. 3, 22).

"One characteristic common to all kinds of movement is that it is a process by which potentiality and possibility pass into actuality" (vi. 3, 22).

(3) A Body of Types, or Images and Reasons. Whatever exists is, in some manner, an expression of a type, an evidence of a reason.

The Spiritual World is the realm of first-types or ideas of all things that are or ever will be. But the Sensible World may be regarded as a body of second-types which are emanations and reflections of the Spiritual originals.

The first-types are universal and infinite, while the second-types are finite in particularization although conditionally infinite in potential expression.

The first are unitary and simple, but the second multiplex. Each spiritual archetype is the producing cause of an endless series of secondary types and these latter, in turn, are continually productive of multiform expressions.

"The universe is full of variety: it contains all the 'reasons' and an infinite number of different powers" (iv. 4, 36).

The type of an object is not only its formal cause but also the reason of its very existence.

The further these objects proceed from their fontal types the more are they subject to the conditions of Time and Space, and, hence, the more temporal and impermanent they become. But the nearer they approach to their original paradigms the more enduring and stable are their natures.

"Every natural image remains what it is so long as its archetype subsists.

"It is, therefore, an error to believe that while the Spiritual World subsists the Sensible World could perish" (v. 8, 12).

The Body of the Universe, therefore, in some manner, endures for ever. It is to the World Soul what the human body is to the human Soul. It is destined to provide the vehicle in which "the Soul will take its time-experiences up with it to the Threshold of Eternity; it will leave nothing behind as it crosses the threshold" (W. R. Inge).

(4) Nature—as Contemplation. The foregoing headings treat of the Sensible Universe as a whole, but what follows

deals separately with the Natural and Material constituents of the Universe.

The Universal Soul is said to beget an Image of itself, and this image Plotinus calls "Nature."

"On the one hand it is by the contemplation of the principle from which it proceeds that the Soul achieves fulness; on the other hand it is by itself proceeding that it begets an image of itself" (v. 2, 1).

Soul is potentially all things. Every existing thing images some particular Soul activity, and Nature, as the plural-unity of these images, is thus termed an Image of Soul.

It therefore acts in a manner analogous to Soul, *i.e.*, by way of contemplation, and, at the same time, is itself a contemplation of Soul.

"If anyone were to demand of Nature why it produces, it would answer"

"In the first place, that which is produced is the result of my silent contemplation, a contemplation naturally produced, for being born myself of contemplation, I am naturally contemplative, and that which contemplates in me (*i.e.*, Soul) produces objects of contemplation, even as geometers describe figures while contemplating" (iii. 8, 4).

The three primal Acts of Soul have their correspondence in those of Nature.

"To be what Nature is, and to produce what she produces, are identical. Because she is form, she is simultaneously contemplation and contemplated object. As she is all three: contemplation, contemplated object and the form or reason of each object, Nature produces by the mere fact that it is her essence to be these things" (iii. 8, 3).

This contemplative habit is the desire of each natural object to produce and behold an image of itself. It is natural cosmic desire.

"All things derive their being from contemplation—those which truly exist as well as those which are produced by them" (iii. 8, 7).

"Hence (also) when animals generate, the seminal reasons within them, stimulate to production, the whole of which is the energy of contemplation and a stimulus desiring to beget and behold many forms" (iii. 8, 7).

And this, of course, applies equally to all sensible things, and to sensible man himself in so far as he follows merely natural instincts.

(5) Nature—as Generation. Nature's generations, therefore, are the effects of contemplations.

Like begets like, and in so far as these generations tend to reproduce themselves, they are contemplations.

"In the Sensible Universe life resembles an immense chain in which every being occupies a point, begetting a posterior being, and itself begotten by a prior one.

"Each is distinct but not separate from the prior generated being and the posterior begotten being into which it passes without being absorbed" (v. 2, 2).

"The generation of things reveals a descending procession, in which the further we go the more does manifoldness increase, and the principle is always more simple than the things it produces" (v. 3, 16).

"It is the characteristic of that which is generated not always to be what it ought to be and to need to acquire something" (vi. 7, 2).

Generated Natures have a beginning and hence, as such, have an end. They are subject to birth, growth, increase, decay and death. They are always either generating or corrupting, and in their very corruptions are the germs of fresh generations.

If Nature as Generation were the highest principle of all, then nothing that exists could ever depart from an inexorable cycle of natural operations in which generation and corruption alternated.

The Cosmic Scheme would resolve itself into an incessant and meaningless struggle for "the survival of the fittest."

But Nature (as distinct from the Universe as a whole), in all her parts, productions and principles, is in need of the Supranatural, just as Matter is indigent of Form—for without Form, Matter is nonentity. So likewise Nature without Soul would be simply an antitypal movement, mere empty extension and activity. But Nature, with Soul, is destined to be redeemed by the supra-natural process of regeneration, which the Soul introduces when converted to Spirit.

"The Spiritual Man is eternal; he is therefore always complete. But that which becomes human must be generated" (vi. 7, 2).

Man's natural part is generated and therefore in need of regeneration in order to rise above purely natural laws. But Man's spiritual principles are unborn and incorruptible.

In the System of Plotinus the doctrine of evolution is simplified, for it may be defined as an orderly manifestation of universal and eternal archetypes under spatial and temporal conditions.

Eternal Ideas are not the result of Evolution. That which is known as evolution is merely the process by which the types "Here" become more and more perfect manifestations of the Eternal and Perfect prototypes "Yonder."

(6) Nature—as Form. Soul is the Creator of Form; not in the sense of creating something out of nothing, but as causing form to be imparted to formless Matter.

Nature is called the outer activity of Soul. In this sense it is that which informs Matter and without which Matter is nonentity.

Nature is Form; it is the pattern and counterpart of every physical object. It subsists before each physical object comes into existence, and it endures after the physical matter of each object has again been resolved into its elementary state.

"Matter and Form are the constituent elements of corporeal existence, but neither of them is body" (vi. 3, 3).

For the simple reason that body requires them both.

"In bodies one may distinguish on the one hand Matter, and on the other the Form imprinted thereon" (vi. 3, 2).

And even as Matter without Form has no real existence, so Form cannot exist without Matter of some sort—physical or super-physical.

In fact Nature alone is inconceivable without its complement Matter.

"Nature, evidently, has neither feet nor hands nor any artificial or natural instrument. It only needs Matter, on which it works and to which it gives a Form" (iii. 8, 2).

(7) Matter—as the Recipient of Form. In Plotinus Matter is "a mere abstraction, a name for a bare receptacle of forms" (W. R. Inge).

In one sense, even when considered as ponderable substance, it has no actual existence because it may be divided and subdivided to the vanishing point of infinity.

In another sense, nothing could exist on any plane without Matter.

In itself alone Matter is neither body, life, existence, or anything else. Neither is it good or evil.

It is a great paradox.

"It deserves only the name 'nonentity' It is an image and phantom of extension, it escapes whoever wishes to see it. It is present when you do not look at it, it escapes the eye that seeks it.

"It is a phantom equally incapable of remaining or escaping, for Matter does not even have the strength of avoiding form When we try to conceive of its existence, it appears as nonentity, like all the things it contains, it is a fugitive shadow an image of an image.

"It resembles a mirror, in which one might see the reflections of objects external to it; the mirror seems to be filled and to possess everything, though really containing nothing"

"Thus Matter is a shapeless image, into which enter and out of which issue the images of beings" (iii. 6, 7).

Matter, on all planes, is that which is acted upon; it, therefore, implies a universal motive-power.

In the Sensible World, that motive power is the Soul, acting through and by means of Nature.

Nature, in this sense, is the last producing cause, *i.e.*, the furthest removed from the ONE.

"Matter is a substrate underlying Nature, and a residence of forms" (ii. 4, 1).

(8) Matter—as the Recipient of Life. There could be no creation or generation without a material in which and upon which to act.

In the Spiritual World, Nous as Life, requires Spiritual Essence for its eternal activity, and this Essence is, in reality, the Primal Divine Matter of which Sensible and Human Matter is, as it were, the outermost expression. Matter is always the outermost expression of every mode of activity. And thus, in the Sensible World, Plato calls Matter "the Residence or Location of Generation."

Although Matter alone has an inert appearance it is never really inanimate because it is never deprived of life. It ever impinges on Spirit, and every one of its minutest particles is infinitely active.

It may lose its form, or rather, change from one form to another, but this very change involves and evolves life even as corruption generates life.

But Matter, as such, never IS.

"It is always becoming, without ever persisting in its condition or being able to come out of it" (Porphyry).

"Here below, Matter is all things only partly, and is all things only successively; consequently, amidst these perpetual changes nothing is identical, nothing is permanent.

"Above, on the contrary, Matter (or Spiritual Essence) is all things simultaneously, and, possessing all things, could not transform itself" (ii. 4, 2).

(9) Matter—as the Recipient of Order. Matter being that which is acted upon is a neutral principle. It lends itself just as readily to good works as to those that are evil.

In itself it is neither good nor evil, but inasmuch as it is made the instrument or agent of evil, it becomes so much associated therewith that at last it is regarded as the cause or origin of evil.

"Matter in itself would be evil if it could exist by itself; yet Matter, as we know it, has the promise of good.

"Its being consists in what it may become" (ii. 5, 5).

"Matter cannot improve itself; it can only pass into activity by the help of what is above and before it" (W. R. Inge).

"Without the coherence given by Soul, Matter would have no determinate existence" (iv. 7, 3).

"Matter is always the inferior element in that of which it forms a part, but there could be no greater misunderstanding of Plotinus than to suppose that it constitutes a bad world, set dualistically in opposition to the Good World of Spirit and Soul.

"Matter is that without which no effort would be necessary or possible" (W. R. Inge).

Through the inordinations of the secondary principles of the human Soul, Matter becomes the recipient and symbol of disorder, but its proper function, for man as for the universe, is to be the recipient and symbol of Order.

In the Sensible World "Matter is the written lore of God and the dark type of heavenly Beauty and Truth."

"It is the necessary condition of all Good, in so far as Good is a progress from potentiality to actuality. There could be no Cosmos without form working in Matter" (ii. 4, 4.)

"Every grade of being performs its highest act in becoming the Matter of the grade above it.

"Thus, the all-but non-existent Matter, at the bottom of the scale, is redeemed in giving itself as the recipient of form" (W. R. Inge).

Matter can never pass into nothingness.

It is indestructible. It either reverts to its primal condition, or it fulfils its true purpose as the Recipient of Order by being gradually redeemed in the regenerating process set up by Soul when consciously converted to Spirit.

By entering, thus, into the Spiritual and Ideal Order, the Soul lifts up all that is "Here" into its proper place "Yonder."

Matter, thus, is no longer Matter, as we know it "Here," but is Spiritual and Universal Essence, while Nature is no longer Nature, but is Spiritual and Eternal Life.

"THE SYSTEM OF PLOTINUS"

§ 8. THE PATH TO LIBERATION.

IN the preceding sections the activity of the Soul has been referred to as a process whereby it passes from potentiality into actuality.

From one point of view this process is reversed when the Soul enters Spiritual activity, for then the Actual becomes the Ideal.

The Actual World, in this sense, is the Sensible World; while the Ideal is the Spiritual.

In the Actual World the Soul strives for a goal it never reaches.

In the Ideal World the goal is attained.

The Actual life is a continual struggle and a longing for something better.

The Ideal Life is a cessation of vain striving and the fulfilment of all desires.

The contemplation of the Ideal does not mean the ceasing from further effort, but rather, when the Soul flags beneath the sense of the limitations and difficulties of the Actual, then the inner eye, steadfastly fixed upon the Ideal Beauty and Truth, gives new hope to the Soul to renew its flight to the Supernal Realms.

The Ideal is within and above: the Actual is without and below. The Ideal is universal and eternal: the Actual is partitive and transient.

In the one case the Artist-Soul is still contending with Matter in the endeavour to give to it that Form which has been glimpsed above. In the other case the Matter is lifted up to the Spiritual Essence in which the Soul beholds the Archetypal Beauty.

Again, in the Actual World, the Soul strives for virtue, but finds no permanent standard of values and seems predestined to fail of full attainment.

But in the Spiritual Ideal World, virtue is transcended, because There the Soul is at-one with the Law which is behind and above all pairs of opposites.

In the Actual World Man must toil and suffer, but when the vision of Truth is attained, the Real is seen in and through the false, the Actual and Ideal are blended into one, and liberation from the limitations of the Sensible World is won.

The Plotinian Path to Liberation is threefold, viz., via the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

All Soul activities are characterized, in some manner, by these three primal Ideals. In fact all human beings can be thus classified.

"Three kinds of men offer themselves for our examination: the philosopher, the musician and the lover" (i. 3, 1).

In the Plotinian sense these three correspond to the Seekers of Truth, Goodness or Harmony and Beauty respectively.

The Seeker of Harmony "allows himself to be easily moved by beauty and admires it greatly, but he is not able, by himself, to achieve the intuition of the beautiful. He needs the stimulus of external impressions.

"He avoids all that seems contrary to the laws of harmony and unity, and enjoys rhythm and melody. . . .

"He requires to be taught that his admiration of these things is inspired by their intelligible (spiritual) harmony. . . .

"He must be introduced to philosophy by a process of reasoning that will lead him to recognize truths of which he is ignorant, though he possesses them latently" (i. 3, 1).

The Seeker of Beauty "has a reminiscence of the beautiful, but as Here below he is separated from it, he does not clearly know it. Charmed by the beautiful objects that he beholds, he falls into an ecstasy.

"Therefore, he must be taught not to content himself with thus admiring a single body, but, by the aid of reason, to embrace all bodies that reveal beauty; showing him that it is something different from bodies and is derived elsewhere.

"He must be shown that beauty is to be found in the arts, the sciences, the virtues, all of which are suitable means of familiarizing the lover with the taste of incorporeal beauty.

"He will then be made to see that beauty is One, and will be shown the element which, in every object, constitutes its beauty.

"From virtues he will be led to progress to the intelligible essence, from whence he will have nothing else to do but to proceed towards the Supreme Goal" (i. 3, 2).

The Seeker of Truth "is naturally disposed to rise to the Spiritual World. Borne on by light wings, he aspires thither without needing to learn to disengage himself from sense-objects.

"His only uncertainty will concern the path to be followed, for which he will need a guide.

"He must therefore be shown the Path and be helped to liberate himself entirely from the fetters of corporeal natures.

"For this purpose he is encouraged to apply himself to metaphysics and mathesis, or instructional discipline, in order to accustom him to think of abstract things and believe in their existence. And after mathesis he must be taught dialectics" (i. 3, 3).

(1) VIA THE TRUTH.

Plotinus asks :—

"What method, art or study will lead us to the Goal we are to attain, namely the Good, the First Principle, the Divinity, by a demonstration which itself can serve to raise the Soul to the Spiritual World?" (i. 3, 1).

Dialectics, he says, can show us the way.

"It is the method and discipline which brings with it the power of pronouncing, with final truth, upon the nature and relation of things; also the knowledge of the Good and of its opposites, of the eternal and the temporal" (i. 3, 4).

Dialectics may be defined as the art of reasoning scientifically.

Plotinus himself employs dialectics throughout the *Enneads* and many are the examples one can find of its application.

According to the Plotinic Method it is applied in order to know :—

- (1) What each thing is;
- (2) In what it differs from other things;
- (3) What is common to it and to other things;
- (4) If a thing is, where it subsists;
- (5) What is its degree of real being; and
- (6) What is its degree of non-being.

It likewise considers :—

- (1) The Good in each thing;
- (2) That which is contrary to the Good in each thing.
- (3) What is Eternal, and
- (4) What is Transient.

The application of these considerations to all things not

only discloses their internal and external nature, but also places them in their respective categories in the scale of existences, so that a correct estimate may be obtained of their value as means contributing to the one Great End.

All things—good or evil—can be useful, if seen in their true relationship.

"Dialectics can comprehend, by regular processes, all true existence. . . .

"It does away with hypotheses in order to make its ground secure. The Eye of the Soul, is, by its gentle aid, lifted upwards."—Plato.

"It treats of all things scientifically and not according to mere opinion.

"It concentrates its whole attention on the Spiritual World and having established itself there, returns by analysis to first principles

"Dialectics receives its clear principles from Spirit, which furnishes Soul with what it can receive. In possessing these ideas it combines and distinguishes its material until it comes to pure Spiritual Knowledge.

"Dialectics is the most precious part of philosophy: all existing things are Matter for it; it approaches them methodically, possessing things and thoughts in combination. . . .

"Falsehood and sophisms it recognizes only to reject them as alien to itself.

"The lower kind of knowledge it leaves to the special sciences, seizing the general truth about them by a species of intuition" (i. 3, 4-6).

"Dialectics, then, is the study of first principles which leads up to intuitional wisdom. It passes through logic and at last rises above it" (W. R. Inge).

"Dialectics is only one part of philosophy, but the most important part" (i. 3, 6).

Because without it we could not philosophize nor gain any kind of true knowledge—lower or higher.

"Could the lower knowledge not be possessed without dialectics or wisdom? It would, at least, be imperfect. On the other hand, although the dialectician, i.e., true sage, no longer needs these inferior things, he would never have become such without them; they must precede and they must increase with the progress made in dialectics (i. 3, 6).

In other words as the conception of the external universe becomes more co-ordinated, so it is recognized more and more

for what it really is, viz., an outer and mutable expression of an inner and immutable reality. This, far from implying non-being to the Sensible World, exalts it in the consciousness of one who thus contemplates it, for it is then seen to be relatively perfect and truly worthy of its Divine Author.

(2) VIA THE GOOD.

When the Actual World is thus contemplated as a revelation of Truth, all things in it are seen to be Good.

The Good is the condition of perfect order and knowledge. It is that which makes the world intelligible.

"Good, in relation to finite experience, is the perfection to which each grade in the hierarchy (of being) aspires, and having attained which it passes into the next stage" (W. R. Inge).

This progression is essentially orderly and natural, because

"All things strive after life, after immortality, and after activity" (vi. 7, 20).

But in order for the Soul to gain a consciousness of this underlying goodness and harmony, it must learn to distinguish between a Good and *the* Good.

"The chief test whether we are really pursuing the Good, is that the Good cannot be desired for any reason outside Itself.

"Heaven is in our Souls, or nowhere (iv. 4, 6). If we associate pleasure with the Good as an essential aspect of it, we are not thinking of *The* Good, but only of *our* Good. There is nothing wrong in this: we must set before us relative and partial goods while we are ourselves imperfect" (W. R. Inge).

But if we aspire to reach the Goal via the Good we must do so for the sake of the Good Itself and not for our own sakes.

To seek to be virtuous merely from a cold sense of duty, or because we hope thus to be rewarded by personal happiness and peace, is not the manner that Plotinus would have us seek.

Such Quests serve their purpose in the universal scheme of things but their chief objection is the fact that they are invariably accompanied by repeated disappointments which gradually dishearten all but the most ardent of seekers.

If we follow Plotinus, however, we shall be spared much of what is termed "the dark night of the Soul," because since we seek *The* Good we do not suffer in the same way when *our* Good recedes more and more into the background.

Nevertheless, on the Path to the Good, Virtue has an essential place. Not necessarily as a moral quality, but rather as an excellence, as its name implies.

"Virtue is not the Good, but a good" (i. 8, 6).

It is that by reason of which each thing is excellent according to its kind.

"Thus, the Good of Matter is Form, the Good of Body is the Soul, the Good of the Soul is virtue, and above virtue, Spirit, and the Good of Spirit, is the ONE" (W. R. Inge).

"In Matter, Form produces Order and Beauty; in the Body, Soul produces Life; in the Soul, Spirit produces wisdom, virtue and happiness; and in the Spirit, the First Light produces a Divine Light which transforms it, makes it see the Godhead and share the ineffable felicity of the First Principle" (W. R. Inge).

In order to enter the Goodness of the Grade above it, each thing must surrender itself wholly to that grade and become the Matter upon which the superior principle acts. In thus losing itself each thing is redeemed and lifted up.

Hence the Soul's liberation is to be attained, not by becoming good, but by becoming assimilated to that which is above it. In this assimilative process the various virtues are instrumental.

The first species of virtues in the System of Plotinus, are the Physical ones, which pertain to the body and its senses.

The second species are the Ethical, which "are ingenerated by custom and a certain right opinion" (T. Taylor). They have to do with the formation of good habits and a well-ordered life.

The third are the Political, viz. :—

"Prudence about the part of our nature which deliberates and consults; fortitude about the irascible part; temperance, in the agreement and concord of the part that desires, with the reasoning power; and justice in each of these parts performing its proper function" (i. 2, 1).

But none of these lesser virtues necessarily assimilate the Soul to Divinity, for the divine nature is immeasurably superior to all such excellencies.

The virtues above the Political are those styled the Cathartic and their province is to separate the Soul from the bondage of body by a mystical purgation which introduces

the Soul to the Theoretic or Contemplative virtues which follow them.

"All virtues are in a sense a preparation for contemplation " (i. 3, 1).

"The Theoretic virtues elevate the Soul to the vision of True Being " (T. Taylor).

They impart spiritual perception to the Soul. But they are not the highest virtues.

"According to Plotinus, there is also another gradation of the virtues besides these, viz., the Paradigmatic " (T. Taylor).

By these the Soul is assimilated to the paradigms or archetypes in Nous or Spirit.

"Virtues, therefore, follow each other in the Soul in the same manner as these paradigms in Nous, which is itself, prior to virtue. For in the Spiritual World intelligence is wisdom and science; a conversion to itself is temperance; its proper activity is the performance of its appropriate duty and is itself justice; while that which is, as it were, fortitude, is immateriality and an abiding with purity in itself " (i. 2, 7).

"All virtues are purifications and necessarily consist in the Soul being purified, for otherwise, no one of them would be perfect. And he, indeed, who possesses the greater virtues has necessarily the lesser; but he who possesses the lesser has not necessarily the greater " (Ibid.).

"This, therefore, is the life which is the principal and leading aim of a worthy man. . . . Not (merely) to be without sin, but to be assimilated to God " (i. 2, 6).

(3) VIA THE BEAUTIFUL.

In the Truth the intelligible unity of all things is revealed.

In the Good the harmony and order of all life is manifested.

But in the Beautiful is the final perfection and consummation of all.

The Soul is potentially all things. Therefore all Ideals are latent within it.

Hence it rejoices when it beholds Truth, and is happy when it is in harmony with the Good; but its highest experiences are those wherein it glimpses the Supreme Beauty.

"Beauty is the property in things which the Soul recognizes as akin to its own essence; while the ugly is that which it feels to be alien and antipathetic. Beautiful things remind the Soul of its

own spiritual principle,—they do so because they participate in the Form which comes from the Spiritual World " (W. R. Inge).

"The Soul, by the very force of its nature—by its belonging to the noble order in the rank of beings,—when it sees anything of that kinship or any trace of that kinship, thrills with delight, takes its own to itself, and so is stirred afresh to the sense of its own nature and of all its affinity " (i. 6, 2).

The Ennead of Plotinus "On the Beautiful" is unquestionably the finest of all. Many are the Mystics whom it has inspired.

Its principles are simple and easily applicable to his whole System, for in the light of it, all Soul activities dedicated to the highest, become species of divine art. It is thus simply a question of the Artist-Soul acting on Matter and imparting to it the Form of those Ideal Patterns which it contemplates whenever it sinks into its own innermost depths or soars in aspiration to its uppermost heights.

All pure unmingled Soul activities are beautiful and impart beauty to the secondary principles. The difficulty, of course, is to attain to a living consciousness of that pure Soul energy.

"The things Here are beautiful by participation in the Forming Idea " (i. 6, 2).

"An ugly thing is something that has not been entirely mastered by its true type and reason. The Matter of it not having offered itself to be controlled throughout by the Forming Idea " (i. 6, 2).

"Where the Forming Idea has entered, it has grouped and co-ordinated what from a diversity of parts was to become a unity; it has wrought diversity to a single determined reality, stamping on it the unity of harmonious coherence; for the Idea is a unity and what it shapes must become a unity in the degree possible to what is formed from diversity " (i. 6, 2).

"It is thus that the material thing becomes beautiful, by partaking in the reason of the Divine " (Ibid.).

The following extracts, in which the Master Plotinus points to the Supreme Goal of his mystical Path, need no comments :—

"And there is a faculty peculiarly addressed to Beauty,—one incomparably sure in the appreciation of its own,—which unerringly discerns the Beautiful when all the powers of the Soul hold court together. Or perhaps it is the Soul itself that acts immediately, naming the Beautiful when it discerns something accordant

with its own indwelling Idea—using this Idea as a canon of accuracy for the judging ” (i. 6, 3).

“ Let the Soul but be cleared of the desires that come by its too intimate commerce with the body, emancipated from all the passions, purged from all that has accrued by its embodiment, withdraw to itself again,—in that moment the ugliness that came only from the alien nature is stripped away ” (i. 6, 5).

“ The Soul then, becomes Idea and Reason, wholly free from body, entirely of the Divine Order from which the Fountain of Beauty rises and all the Streams of Beauty. Hence the Soul lifted up to Nous is beautiful in all its powers ” (i. 6, 6).

“ For Nous, and what proceeds from Nous, are the Soul’s beauty,—a beauty native to it and not foreign, for only so is it truly Soul. And it is just to say that in the Soul’s becoming a good and beautiful thing, is its becoming like to God, for Thence is all the beauty and all the good of beings (i. 6, 6).

“ How do we come to the vision of the inaccessible Beauty, dwelling as if in consecrated precincts and remote from the common ways, where all might see, even the profane ?

“ He that has the strength, let him arise and withdraw into himself, foregoing all that is known to the eyes . . . all this (lower) order of things you must set aside. Nor do you need to look : you must close the eyes and call instead upon another vision which is to be awakened within you, a vision which all possess, but which few apply ” (i. 6, 8).

“ Withdraw into yourself, and if you do not find yourself beautiful as yet, do as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful . . . cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is shadowed, labour to make all glow with beauty and do not cease until there shall shine out on you the Godlike Splendour of virtue, until you shall see the Final Goodness surely established in the stainless shrine.

“ And when you have become this perfect work and see that It and you are one . . . when you perceive that you have grown to this ; you are now become very Vision, now call up all your confidence, strike forward yet a step—you need a guide no longer—strain and see.

“ This is the only eye that sees the Mighty Beauty. If the eye that undertakes the vision be dimmed by vice, and unpurified and unable in its cowardly flickering to see the Uttermost Brightness, then it sees nothing, even though another point to what lies plain to see before it. To any vision must be brought an eye fitted to what is to be seen and having some likeness to it. Never did eye see the sun unless it had become sun-like, and never can Soul see Beauty unless itself be Beautiful ” (i. 6, 9).

§ 9. TABLES.

TABLE V.—KEY TO TERMINOLOGY EMPLOYED BY VARIOUS AUTHORITIES IN THE WORKS OF PLOTINUS.

I.—THE ONE AND THE GOOD.

1. The First Divine Hypostasis.
The First. The First Cause.
2. The Good, The True and The Beautiful.
3. The Father.
4. The Alone. The Infinite.
The Unconditioned. The Supreme.
The Highest. The Transcendence.
The Semper. The Absolute.
The Unity of Unities.

II.—NOUS OR SPIRIT.

1. The Second Divine Hypostasis.
The Divine Duality.
2. The First Emanation.
The Logos.
3. The Son. The Christos.
4. Spirit and The Spiritual World.
Spiritual Essence and Life.
5. Intellect and The Intellectual Principle.
The Intelligible World and Principle.
Intelligible-Intellectual Principle.
Divine Mind. Divine Intellection.
Divine Intelligence; the First Thinker.
The Reason of All Things.
6. The Ideal World.
The Celestial Realm.
Realm of Ideas, Thoughts, Paradigms and Archetypes.
7. Divine Being. Real Being.
The Authentic Existence.
8. There. Yonder. The Above.

III.—THE SOUL.

1. The Third Divine Hypostasis.
2. The Second Emanation.
3. The Holy Spirit. The Creator
The Demiurgos.
4. The All-Soul. The Over-Soul.
The Universal Soul. The World-Soul. The Human Soul.
Psyche.

IV.—V.—NATURE AND MATTER.

1. The Last of things.
The Ultimate.
2. Generation.
3. Creation.
4. Nature and the Natural World.
Matter and the Material World.
5. Sense and the Sensible World.
6. The Actual World.
Realm of Transiency.
The World of Time.
7. Precipitated Existence.
Transiency.
8. Here. The Below. Hyle.

The following is a tentative re-arrangement of the treatises of Plotinus in line with the System as set forth in this Manual.

Students may find it helpful to read the Enneads in this order rather than in the chronological or other order in which they are usually printed.

The titles for each treatise, which vary according to the different translations, are revised and follow the terminology herein adopted.

TABLE VI.—REVISED ORDER OF THE PLOTINIAN TREATISES.

I.—THE ONE AND THE GOOD.

Ennead VI,	Treatise 9,	The Good and the One.
„ V,	„ 4,	On the One and Its Emanations.
„ V,	„ 5,	On the One, the Good and the Intelligibles.
„ VI,	„ 7,	On Ideas and the Good.

II.—NOUS.

Ennead V,	Treatise 9,	On Nous, Spiritual Ideas and Essences.
„ V,	„ 1,	The Three Divine Hypostases.
„ V,	„ 6,	The Intellective Principles.
„ V,	„ 7,	Ideas of Individuals.
„ V,	„ 3,	On Consciousness and the Transcendent.
„ VI,	„ 6,	On Numbers.
„ VI,	„ 4,	On True Being or Existence (1).
„ VI,	„ 5,	On True Being or Existence (2).
„ II,	„ 6,	On Essence and Being

III.—SOUL.

Ennead III,	Treatise 9,	The Soul, Nous and the Good.
„ IV,	„ 7,	Immortality of the Soul.
„ IV,	„ 9,	The Unity of the Soul.
„ IV,	„ 1,	The Essence of the Soul (1).
„ IV,	„ 2,	The Essence of the Soul (2).
„ IV,	„ 3,	Problems concerning the Soul (1).
„ IV,	„ 4,	Problems concerning the Soul (2).
„ IV,	„ 5,	Problems concerning the Soul (3).
„ IV,	„ 6,	Faculties of Soul,—Sensation and Memory
„ IV,	„ 8,	The Descent of the Soul.
„ I,	„ 1,	The Nature of Living and the Nature of Man.
„ III,	„ 4,	The Individual Guardian of the Soul.
„ II,	„ 9,	That the Creator and the World are not evil (written against the Gnostics).

IV.—THE SENSIBLE WORLD.

Ennead	III,	Treatise	8,	On Nature, Contemplation and the One.
„	V,	„	2,	On Generation.
„	III,	„	7,	Eternity and Time.
„	III,	„	6,	The Relations of the Corporeal and Incorporeal.
„	II,	„	1,	The Universe,—Celestial and Terrestrial.
„	VI,	„	8,	On Freewill.
„	III,	„	2,	Providence (1).
„	III,	„	3,	Providence (2).
„	III,	„	1,	Fate.
„	II,	„	2,	The Movements of Celestial Bodies.
„	II,	„	3,	The Influence of Celestial Bodies.
„	II,	„	5,	Potentiality and Actuality.
„	II,	„	4,	Matter.
„	VI,	„	1,	The Categories of Existence (1).
„	VI,	„	2,	The Categories of Existence (2).
„	VI,	„	3,	The Categories of Existence (3).
„	II,	„	8,	On Vision.
„	II,	„	7,	On Mixture.

V.—THE PLOTINIAN PATH.

(1) *Via the Good.*

Ennead	I,	Treatise	7,	The First Good and other Goods.
„	I,	„	8,	The Nature and Origin of Evil.
„	I,	„	2,	The Virtues
„	I,	„	4,	Happiness (1).
„	I,	„	5,	Happiness (2).
„	I,	„	9,	The Separation of the Soul from the Body

(2) *Via the True*

Ennead I, Treatise 3, Dialectics.

(3) *Via the Beautiful.*

Ennead	V,	Treatise	8,	Intelligible Beauty.
„	I,	„	6,	On the Beautiful.
„	III,	„	5,	On Love.

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